

COMMENTS AT EPA LISTENING SESSION

Pittsburgh, PA - April 23, 2003

I am Wyona Coleman and have been working on coal issues for many years as a Sierra Club member and, for the past seven years, as a member of the Tri-State Citizens Mining Network. Working with citizens in the coal fields, I am fully aware of the health impacts experienced by senior citizens from both coal extraction and its burning. I am, by the way, certainly in the age bracket that your administration would devalue with a so-called "Senior Death Discount."

By using fuzzy math about the hypothetical value of a sixty-five year old to justify the weakening of clean air standards, the administration endangers the health of all citizens. Senior discounts are available at motels and movie theaters but, unfortunately, not at funeral parlors. We all face dying sooner than we might if tighter rules were enacted limiting air emissions.

Risk Assessment as always been a dubious and sleazy science. How do you evaluate a life? What value would my children and grandchildren put on my life and its quality? More to the point - what value would I put on their lives? They live here, too, unfortunately intermingled with us 3/5 persons.

Relaxation of pollution control will affect not only those old fossils but, also, infants and children, pregnant women and nursing mothers, and people with chronic diseases, such as asthma. Children, because they are at a beginning stage of development, have a higher threshold of susceptibility. According to the Clean Air Task Force, the fine particles from reactions of NO_x and SO₂ emissions in the atmosphere cause more than 603,000 asthma attacks a year, cutting short the lives of more than 30,000 people

Working the math in the other direction - citing the critical need to provide more protection for all those citizens especially vulnerable to air pollution - would present a much different picture.

Air pollution is not the only health hazard for senior citizens living in the coalfields of western Pennsylvania. They also suffer from the impacts of the extraction of coal used to power the electric generating facilities which rain pollution from above. A 1998 study conducted by the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania found that stress levels in senior citizens being undermined by longwall operations were seriously imperiling their health and lives.

Physical and health issues experienced by senior citizens included cardiac problems, respiratory problems, severe nervous problems, dizziness, and serious depression. One mental health professional who contributed to the Audubon study concluded that the anxiety, frustration, depression and fear that people speak of are a justifiable source of concern. "The problem is wide spread, but no one is looking after the mental health of affected people."

Submitted by Wyona Coleman, 551 Pittsburgh Rd., W. Brownsville, PA 15417